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Identifying Food Quackery

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Many people concerned with health problems ask the Food and Drug Administration for information on some of the following points:

1. *What is quackery?* The term "quackery" encompasses both people and products. The "health practitioner" who has a "miracle cure," but no medical training, is a quack; the worthless drug or food supplement pushed in deceitful promotions is a quack product; the machine that has impressive knobs and dials, but does nothing except take money out of the pockets of the unsuspecting, is a quack device.

2. *What kinds of quackery are there?* There are basically three types of quackery: worthless drugs and cosmetics; silly food fads and unnecessary food supplements; and useless medical devices. Their promoters' interest is not to protect or restore your health, but to separate you from your money.

- *Worthless drugs.* These include "cures" for baldness among men, which is incurable; chemical "face peels" that promise new youth, but may bring permanent disfigurement; "prompt relief" from colitis through laxatives which can seriously worsen this condition; drugs that "melt away" fat without dieting—when dieting is the only way known to medicine to reduce weight. Most cruel and dangerous of all are the "effective treatments" for diabetes and cancer. In diabetes, they can cause coma and death; in cancer, the patient is robbed of the one element that can save his life—valuable time during which effective treatment could still be administered.

- *Food fads.* Contrary to what self-appointed "nutrition experts" say, American farmland is not "depleted;" chemical fertilizers and modern food processing do not deprive our food of its nutritive value. Americans are the best-fed people in the world; diseases caused by dietary deficiencies have all but disappeared. Nutritional needs of older people are much like those of any other age group. The need for vitamin, mineral or other food supplements can be established only by a physician.

- *Medical devices.* The electrocardiograph records the action of the heart; a special gauge shows the blood pressure; X-rays record abnormalities within the body. But there is no machine that can diagnose or treat different diseases by simply turning a knob or flashing lights; no apparatus can reduce excess weight by vibration; no glove or bracelet can "cure" arthritis with "electricity" or "uranium ore." Sometimes quackery even involves legitimate devices. It is practically impossible to get properly fitted eyeglasses or dentures by mail order, for example.

3. *How can quackery be recognized?* Quackery follows well-defined patterns. If you are using or considering a treatment and can answer "yes" to any of the following questions, it is very likely that you may be one of the thousands of people victimized by quacks each year.

- Is the product or service offered called a "secret remedy?"

- Does the sponsor claim that he is battling the medical profession which is attempting to suppress his wonderful discovery?
- Is the remedy sold from door-to-door, by a self-styled "health advisor," or promoted in lectures to the public, from town-to-town?
- Is this "miracle" drug, device or diet promoted in a sensational magazine, by a faith healer's group or a crusading organization of laymen?
- Does the promoter show you "testimonials" on the wonderful miracles his product or services have performed for others?

- Is the product or service good for a vast variety of illnesses, real or fancied?

4. *What can you do?* If you suspect that you are the victim of quackery, there are a number of things you can do:

- See your physician or inform your county medical society.
- Get in touch with the Food and Drug Administration, either at its district office in your area, or in Washington, D. C.
- Ask the Better Business Bureau about the reputation of the promoter.
- If the drug or device was promoted through the mail, inform your local Post Office.

Selected List of Sources of Information on Nutrition and Health

Books

Choosing a reliable book or pamphlet on nutrition is difficult because many people are writing about food. While some of these books are excellent, many are misleading and faddish in approach. Fad books often distort scientific facts that become serious potential dangers to health.

Listed below are a few reliable books on nutrition that are written for the general public. They contain little scientific terminology and are easy to read and understand.

Bradley, Hassell, and Sundberg, Carole. *Keeping Food Safe*. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975.

Betty Crocker's *How to Feed Your Family to Keep Them Fit and Happy . . . No Matter What*. New York: Golden Press, 1972.

Deutsch, R. M. *Realities of Nutrition*. Palo Alto, California: Bull Publishing Company, 1976.

Deutsch, R. M. *The Family Guide to Better Food and Better Health*. Des Moines, Iowa: Meredith Corporation, 1971.

Food for Us All—The Yearbook of Agriculture, 1969. USDA, Washington, D. C., Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office.

Mayer, Jean. *A Diet for Living*. New York: David McKay Company, 1975.

Shopper's Guide—The Yearbook of Agriculture, 1974. USDA, Washington, D. C., Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office.

Agencies and Organizations

The following agencies and organizations have nutrition- and health-related pamphlets available to the public, either free or for a small charge.

Allergy Foundation of America
801 Second Avenue
New York, New York 10017

American Dental Association
211 E. Chicago Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60611

American Diabetes Association
1 W 48th Street
New York, New York 10020

American Dietetic Association
Publication Department
620 N. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60611

American Heart Association, Texas
Affiliate, Inc.
P. O. Box 15186
Austin, Texas 78761

American Home Economics Association
1600 20th Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20009

American Medical Association
535 N. Dearborn Street
Chicago, Illinois 60610

American Public Health Association
1015 18th Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20036

Arthritis and Rheumatism Foundation
1212 Avenue of Americas
New York, New York 10036

Food and Agriculture Organization of the
United Nations
Liaison Office for North America
1776 F Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20431

Food and Nutrition Board
National Research Council
2101 Constitution Avenue, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20418

National Association for Mental Health
1800 Kent Street
Rosslyn, Virginia 22209

Nutrition Foundation, Inc.
Office of Education and Public Affairs
888 17th Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20006

Superintendent of Documents
U. S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D. C. 20402

U. S. Food and Drug Administration
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, Maryland 20851

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